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McFarlan Carriage (Later McFarlan Motor Car) Company  
Connersville  
Fayette County  
Indiana

Photographs and  
Written and Historical data

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

McFarlan Carriage (Later McFarlan Motor Car) Company

HAER IN-8

Location:	South side of Mount Street, opposite Columbia UTM: 16.659410.4390230 Quad: Connersville, Indiana
Date of Construction:	1886
Present Owner:	Demolished
Significance:	John B. McFarlan the founder of the McFarlan Carriage Company, laid the foundation for Connersville's automobile industry: the carriage company that he founded successfully made the transition from buggy to automobile manufacturing, and the industrial park that he promoted to insure the growth of his own company became Connersville's industrial heart.
Historians:	Robert Rosenberg Donald Sackheim

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John B. McFarland, later one of Connersville's prominent entrepreneurs and manufacturers, organized the McFarlan Carriage Company in 1857 soon after his arrival in Connersville. The carriage works prospered and in 1909, after John McFarlan's death, his grandson Harry McFarlan assumed control of the firm and successfully guided it during the transition from buggy manufacturing to custom automobile production. In several respects the success of John McFarlan as businessman and entrepreneur laid the foundation for Connersville's automobile industry: the carriage company that he founded successfully made the transition from buggy to automobile manufacturing, and the industrial park that he developed as a scheme to insure the growth of his own company later became a successful industrial center which survived well into the mid-twentieth century.

John B. McFarlan was born in London, England on 7 November 1882 and at 8 years of age moved with his family to Hamilton County, Ohio, near Cincinnati. Reared on the family farm, he was apprenticed at age 18 as a carriage blacksmith to the firm of John C. Miller and Sons of Cincinnati. Upon completion of his training, he worked as a carriage blacksmith near Cincinnati before moving to Cambridge, Indiana. He remained in Cambridge for six years and had opened his own carriage works before he migrated south, following the Whitewater Canal, to Connersville.

Soon after his arrival in Connersville in 1856, John McFarlan purchased several local buggy and carriage manufacturers. In 1857, he organized the McFarlan Carriage Company, which effectively centralized a portion of Connersville's carriage manufacture under his control.

The McFarlan Carriage Company's first factory was located at 6th and Central Streets in quarters formerly occupied by the Ware and Vetch Carriage Company, one of the firms McFarlan purchased the previous year. McFarlan remained in the 6th and Central factory for thirty years, but in 1887 the need for room to expand the carriage operation forced him to look for a new factory site. McFarlan's initial success in consolidating a number of small carriage firms under his control in 1856-57 led him to attempt a similar move in 1887 when he formed the Connersville Industrial Park.

The Connersville Industrial Park was the product of the Connersville Land and Improvement Company, a firm McFarlan created in 1887 (see IN-7). McFarlan intended to attract manufacturers and suppliers of carriage and buggy equipment to the park and thereby lower his own costs while providing a steady market for other manufacturers. McFarlan built his new four-story factory on Mount Street opposite Columbia. The four-story structure which fronted Mount Street was 275 feet long and had two ells running to the south that were situated at right angles to the main structure and parallel to each other. One of the first firms to join the McFarlan Carriage Company in the park was the Ansted Spring Company: Ansted-owned enterprises eventually dominated manufacturing in the park (see IN-9, 19, 11, 14).

Initially the site of the park had two advantages which made it attractive to manufacturers, and McFarlan added a third. The Whitewater Canal, which reached Connersville in 1845, and the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad, which reached Connersville in 1850, formed the northern boundary of the park. Both provided

inexpensive transportation of bulky items, and the railroad tied Connersville to the national market. With McFarlan's initiative, the Connersville Natural Gas Company was organized in 1889, and supplied the park with an inexpensive source of fuel by tapping pipelines from the newly discovered gas fields of northern Indiana.

Following John McFarlan's death in 1909, his grandson, Harry McFarlan, assumed management of the McFarlan Carriage Company. Under Harry McFarlan, the company diversified: it began manufacturing automobiles in 1909 and during the next 18 years produced fire trucks, patrol cars, funeral cars, ambulances, and limousines. In 1917, the name of the firm was changed to the McFarlan Motor Car Company, and while the firm specialized in custom cars and trucks, it also produced a line of medium-priced automobiles and manufactured auto bodies for other firms. By 1925 the McFarlan Motor Company produced 26 different models ranging in price from \$2,000 to \$10,000. It is likely that the diversity of products and the uncertainty of production costs culminated in the company's failure.

On 8 August 1928 bankruptcy was declared and roughly a year later, on 1 August 1929, the factory was sold to the Aburn Automobile Company. The Aburn Company used the factory storage space for its finished automobiles.

McFarlan Carriage Company

Notes

- 1 Another carriage firm, Drew and McCracken, shared the building and there were firms across the street from 6th and Central which were also included in the consolidation. See Blommel's "Indiana's Little Detroit."

McFarlane Carriage Company

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